



Junk



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Chapter 1 by stayawesomerrr

Now, when I think back to the excuses my parents used to make, I feel like an idiot. I remember being twelve years old, standing at the top of the staircase and watching all of the people filing into our basement. Some men wore white masks, some women wore bonnets. But they all had small suitcases, as though there was a bus stop beneath our house. And every one of them looked pale, frightened.

My mother would catch me watching from above and send me off to bed. But not before I could ask what was happening.

“We’re just going to talk about grown up things, baby.” Her voice was sweet and high pitched. She always sounded happy, regardless of how concerned she looked. “One day you will join us too. For right now though, you should get some sleep.”

But I didn’t sleep. I never could, with the images of those peoples’ blanched faces in my mind; men and women alike, all terrified. I would lie awake in bed with my ear pressed to the mattress, covering the other side of my head with a pillow.

From inside my shell, the heavy thudding from below was transformed into the sounds of marshmallows bouncing around. See more of Story Wars
were instead turned into a murmuring kind of one-note melody. The notes of each person would resound and then die away. A continuous, endless succession of muffled marshmallows and melodies coming from the invisible bus stop in the basement.

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And then reality hit. Literally. One day Manuel came up to me at school and pushed me hard against the lockers. He punched me in the stomach twice before he even said a word. Only when he saw that the teachers were forcing their way through the crowded hall did he ask me:

“Why is my mother at your house?”

“What?”

I neither knew what his mother looked like, nor where she had been. It was such a weird question, but something inside of me twisted at the thought of the people coming in. I pictured what his mother might look like, her caramel Latina skin looking pale from the terror that would inevitably seize her, because it seized them all.

“I’m sorry,” I said.

“My dad just sits in his room and cries!” he bellowed in my face. He punched me again, this time in my face. The teachers were upon us, restraining him. “Where is she?” he yelled as he was dragged away. “I know she’s there, puto! Tell me she’s there!” I apologized again. “Please, just tell me she’s there,” his voice was breaking now. He sounded like he was tearing up a little. “Isn’t she? Is that where she is? Her name is Gloria. Please, is she okay? Is she...”

He couldn’t hold it back any longer. The teachers gave him enough room to move and he instantly pushed his hands over his face, hiding the tears that were coming now.

Three years passed and I had started getting a reputation. At least I’m guessing that’s what happened, because people completely stopped trying to talk to me as soon as I was in high school. Mother explained that people just turn into bad people the older they get. She said that’s why, when they get to be full-grown adults, they come to our house to try and fix things.

I was just about to ask her again what goes on in the basement, but I stopped myself. I was developing a plan now, to infiltrate the basement and finally see for myself. I knew all my parents

would say is “You’re not old enough.” It always made me feel like I was still a little child, the way they said it. But I was starting to realize I was starting to grow that feeling that I saw all of the other kids at school expressing it. I was starting to grow up. I felt somehow that the only way to get there would be to go in. I knew all my parents went to the grocery store.

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Only recently had I found where dad hid the key to the basement door that was locked from the outside. I had stumbled on a secret drawer in the kitchen when I was looking for a potato peeler. I knew it had to be the key because it had a weird engraving that was identical to tattoos that some of the strangers would have on the backs of their hands. It looked like a snake that was eating its own tail.

As soon as the front door swung shut behind them, I launched down stairs and took up the key. I had expected to need a lot of time to rummage around the basement and see what was going on down there. But I expected wrong. The minute I swung the basement door open, I was overcome with the strong, foul smell that I knew could only be the smell of death.

There was no light switch on the wall, but I found a flashlight hanging on a peg instead. I flipped the beam on and slowly waded through the stench, down the steps, where the air got colder and colder. I could hear the low sounds of moaning, echoing throughout the subterranean passage. At the base of the stairs, there was only cold concrete and bare, steel looking walls enclosing everything.

I stepped on something squishy, and lunged forwards away from it as it spoke:

“Am I forgiven?”

The flashlight beam knifed into an emaciated, poor looking woman, with shackles chaining her feet to the floor. Her eyes refracted a silvery kind of liquid, as though she had cataracts in both of her eyes. I said nothing and staggered further in until I saw a low, red light glowing around the corner.

A hearth was glowing hot at the very end of the basement. It was there that my flashlight fell upon something I could never have imagined. A man, just as withered as the woman chained behind me, was pulling a poker out of the hearth. It was a steel rod with the sign of the serpent on the end, glowing red hot.

“Forgive me,” he whispered to no one.

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A wave of nausea overcame me. I wobbled, almost toppling over myself, before dropping my flashlight and resting my hands on my knees. It was all I could do to keep from vomiting everywhere.

As I hunkered down, I noticed a small pool of blood that trailed off to the right. I regained myself as best I could and followed it off to the side of the room. There was a closet, and as I drew nearer the smell of death and decay became almost unbearable. I reached my hand out to the closet, but something stopped me. Someone else, much stronger, had seized my wrist. I spun around to find my father staring gravely down at me, his face lit from the feeble glow of the hearth.

"You don't want to see what's in there," he said. He smiled at me a little mysteriously. He seemed so natural in the midst of this chamber of death.

"What is this place?" I asked at last.

"This place," he said, reaching down to my ankles and latching something metal around me, "is your new home for the next two years. Apparently you are ready to be an adult, just like the others. You've proven that by disobeying me. So now you, too, must find forgiveness."

I knew I could not resist. Still, I had too many questions. All of those childhood uncertainties were culminating into this absurd place that wreaked of death. I asked him again for a straight answer, as he took his time attaching my shackles to a bolt shared by a corpse that lay decaying on the floor.

"This is Hell," he said, simply. "The knowledge has been handed down to us that God no longer has patience to forgive those who sin against him. On Earth man runs rampant like a disease. It is now only through suffering in our physical bodies that we may repent. It is only through serving in Hell on Earth, that we may be purged from the eternal fire in death. Atonement must be made."

A million objections sprang up in my mind, but somehow a part of me could not resist. A part of me felt that this must be, if only to see what was in there. A part of me knew I deserved this, and longed to be near the fire, to feel it burn to my skin. But I wasn't as lucky as that man, who died in the fire and was set in the side of the

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room with the rest of the bodies. No, I was shackled up next to the withered woman named Gloria, who seemed clueless when I told her that her son was looking for her.

"I'm a sinner," was all she said. "I must find forgiveness."

The End

Write a draft for chapter 2 of 8

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